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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000275

SIPDIS

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G/TIP FOR GAYATRI PATEL, MARK TAYLOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/18/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [KFRD](#) [PREF](#) [ELAB](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT TAKES STEPS AGAINST LABOR TRAFFICKING,
MIGRANT LABOR VIOLATIONS

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Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough. reasons para 1.4(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Government officials and international organization representatives take seriously allegations of labor trafficking and migrant labor violations. The Home Ministry asked for more information on specific allegations, and agreed to follow up with the inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee. The International Organization on Migration is monitoring recent government actions related to cracking down on migration issues. END SUMMARY.

GOVERNMENT INTEREST IN LABOR VIOLATION ISSUES
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12. (SBU) On February 13, POLOFF and two AID officers met with Home Ministry Joint Secretary Mohammad Mojibur Rahman and the staff of the Police Headquarters anti-trafficking cell as part of its monthly visit to review progress on the Bangladesh government's anti-trafficking efforts. This was the first monthly meeting for Rahman, who was appointed to the position six weeks ago as part of the caretaker government's reshuffling of civil servants.

13. (C) After reviewing the monthly statistics on arrests, investigations and prosecutions related to anti-trafficking, POLOFF raised concerns about labor trafficking and migrant labor violations. We informed Rahman and his staff of a May 2006 report by the U.S.-based National Labor Committee on possible labor trafficking and other abuses of migrant workers in Jordan. (Bangladeshi laborers were among those the report identified as being exploited in garment factories in Jordan.) We also raised allegations of exploitation of Bangladeshis seeking jobs in Malaysia.

14. (C) Rahman said he was unfamiliar with the Jordan allegations. He asked for a copy of the report, which POLOFF agreed to provide. POLOFF also gave Rahman the names of three Bangladeshi employment "recruitment" agencies which the report accused of charging exorbitant fees from Bangladeshis and misleading them about their work contracts and conditions in Jordan. Rahman asked his deputy to investigate the three companies and report back to him.

15. (C) POLOFF told Rahman that one of the three companies named in the report, Mahbub International Agency, has also

turned up in a recent anti-corruption investigation of the now-defunct Dhaka-based Oriental Bank. According to press reports, one of Mahbub's accounts was a "ghost" account believed to have been used to launder money. Rahman said they would also look into this possible linkage between labor trafficking and corruption.

¶6. (C) Rahman discussed rumors about the involvement of certain prominent businessmen in possible labor trafficking schemes or migrant labor violations. We suggested that some perpetrators of labor violations may have been arrested already as part of the government's anti-corruption program. Rahman said that the Ministry would look into this, and could raise the issues during interrogations of the suspects.

¶7. (C) In closing, POLOFF emphasized the need for the government to take migrant labor violations and potential labor trafficking seriously. Rahman's deputy said it was already a concern, and the Ministry was working on this with the International Organization on Migration, which coordinates anti-trafficking and labor migration training for police and government officials.

SOME PROGRESS ON LABOR MIGRATION ISSUES =====

¶8. (SBU) In a separate meeting with the International Organization on Migration the next day, POLOFF raised the issue of labor trafficking and migrant labor violations. The resident representative, Shahidul Haque, agreed that this was a problem for Bangladesh, but said that progress has been made, especially in the past six months.

¶9. (C) He said when problems appeared last fall regarding Bangladeshi workers sent to Malaysia under false pretenses, both governments reacted quickly to deal with them. This was made easier by the fact that Bangladesh and Malaysia have a

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bilateral labor agreement on migrant workers. Following an investigation into the allegations of abuses -- which included falsifying documents and breach of contract -- the governments of Bangladesh and Malaysia blacklisted ten "recruitment agencies" from doing any further labor recruiting. The government also worked with the main recruitment agency umbrella organization BIARA to institute a cap on the amount recruitment agencies can charge applicants for jobs. (NOTE: This cap was extended to all countries in late 2006.)

¶10. (C) Haque said his organization has worked closely with the Minister for Expatriate Workers and the Prime Minister's Office to develop an expatriate workers policy -- a first of its kind in South Asia. This policy was approved by the outgoing government of Prime Minister Zia in October.

¶11. (C) He also reported that Bangladeshi immigration authorities stopped 30 Bangladeshi women from traveling to Lebanon on forged documents, including falsified work permits and government registration forms. The subsequent investigation led to police raids, and ultimately the closure and de-licensing, of five recruitment agencies, and the arrests of five officials linked to the fraud.

¶12. (C) Haque agreed that introducing a module on labor issues into planned future training for Foreign Ministry consular officials was a good suggestion. We agreed that this was something for USAID and Haque to discuss in a separate meeting, but is clearly within the mandate of the current agreement between the two organizations.

COMMENT =====

¶13. (C) This issue was new to the joint secretary, but he appeared receptive to investigating the issue, and seemed

particularly interested in the potential linkages between labor violations and some of the recent major anti-corruption arrests. Giasuddin Mahmum, one of the arrested business associates of Tarique Rahman, the former prime minister's son, is believed to be involved in manpower exports. There is every reason to believe the government is genuinely interested in building as strong and broad a case against Mahmum and the other corruption suspects. This could also be an important first step to untangling some of the business relationships that directly or indirectly have been supporting human trafficking.

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